

March 6, 2005

Freedom Watch

Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan



***JTF Wings moves OEF
with many assets, allies
Pages 8/9***



Spc. Cheryl Ransford

Remembrance

From left: Sgt. 1st Class Reginald Hall, Master Sgt. Terry Bly, Sgt. Adonis Fitzpatrick and Spc. Francesca Lafayette sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a traditional gospel song, during the Black History Month observation at Bagram Airfield on Feb. 21. The theme of the celebration was the Niagara Movement, which was initiated to help black communities in the early 1900s.

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A Joint Task Force Wings UH-60 Blackhawk crew chief prepares his helicopter while an AH-64 Apache provides security during a mission at the Bamian Provincial Reconstruction Team site. JTF Wings is the aviation command for Combined Joint Task Force-76. It is responsible for getting supplies to remote areas such as Bamian province in central Afghanistan that can often only be quickly reached by air.

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Photo by Spc. Chris Stump

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Freedom Watch

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68th Med. Co. honored for 'Rescue of the Year'



Story by Staff Sgt. Monica R. Garreau
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — At 5 p.m. on June 24, 2004, the operations center of the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) on Bagram Airfield received a mission to retrieve three Marine casualties following an attack by anti-Coalition militants in eastern Afghanistan.

A wounded Marine was stranded on the steep side of a mountain near Forward Operating Base Asadabad, along with two others who had been killed in action.

The crew — Capt. John Hoffman, Chief Warrant Officer Jason Rayburn, Staff Sgt. Robert Ramirez and Staff Sgt. David Hernandez — departed immediately to evacuate the casualties. None of them could have predicted that it would be the mission of their lives.

"It was just a combination of events that made this particular mission significant," said Hoffman, the copilot.

The mission earned the unit the Army Aviation Association of America Air/Sea Rescue of the Year award.

As if rushing to the rescue of a wounded service member wasn't stressful enough, the crew was continuously challenged by other events throughout the recovery mission.

The crew stopped at FOB Asadabad for more fuel before they could begin the extraction of the Marine. While there, they picked up a Special Forces physician assistant to help Ramirez, the sole medic aboard the MEDEVAC helicopter, stabilize the casualty.

They left to retrieve the Marines but were directed back to the base due to confusion about the casualties' location. As they were returning to FOB Asadabad, a rocket-propelled



Courtesy photos

Soldiers of the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) arrive in Gardez to transport an Afghan boy with wounds from a piece of unexploded ordnance. The Soldiers of 68th Med. Co. received an award from the Army Aviation Association of America for Air/Sea Rescue of the Year for 2004.

pelled grenade was fired at their Blackhawk. It passed over the rotor blades, cleared the front of the AH-64 Apache helicopter that served as the MEDEVAC's escort and exploded 300 meters away from the aircraft. The explosion was immediately followed by more rocket and RPG fire directed at the base, during which the MEDEVAC crewmembers pulled security for their aircraft.

The crew finally received instructions to depart the base and left to pick up the casualties. They soon located the casualties, but the helicopter could not land due to the steep slope of the mountain, so the medic and the PA were lowered to the ground by Hernandez, the crew chief, via the aircraft's hoist. Together, they bandaged the Marine's wound, placed him on a litter and hoisted him safely into the Blackhawk.

But hoisting the two Marine KIAs and getting the medic and PA back in the aircraft was not safe at the time. The priority was getting the patient stabilized, so the aircraft returned to FOB Asadabad, dropped off the patient for treatment and returned to retrieve the other four personnel.

Meanwhile, the medic and PA began to climb down the mountain in

search of a better pick up zone. By this time, the sun had set and the crew was flying with the assistance of night-vision goggles.

Watching the helicopter leave was not easy for Ramirez, nor was it particularly heart-warming for the crew to leave men behind.

"They were walking on the side of a mountain where three guys had been shot by snipers," said Rayburn, the pilot in charge.

"All I thought about was picking up my friend and coming back home," said Hernandez.

Ramirez said being left there was tough to handle.

"You're stuck there wondering if the aircraft's coming back, how the patient's doing," he recalled. The sound of the returning aircraft brought great joy to the stranded men.

"You hear something coming through the air and as soon as you get radio contact with them, it's such a relief," said Ramirez. "You know they are coming back for you."

The location found for the pickup was still not ideal, but "you just had to make the decisions and hope they were the right ones," said Rayburn. With the nose of the Blackhawk pointed toward the mountain and the rotor blades just two or three feet from the slope, the medic and PA climbed aboard the aircraft via the main landing gear.

"It was very hairy, but it was the only way we were going to get our guys back," said



A patient is loaded into a 68th Med. Co. helicopter.

See *MEDEVAC*, Page 14

Engineers welcome replacements at FOB Tiger

Story and photos by Spc. Dijon Rolle
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE TIGER, Afghanistan — Several engineer units are preparing to redeploy as Soldiers from Alaska's 864th Engineer Battalion hit the ground in southern Afghanistan.

The Soldiers at Forward Operating Base Tiger are working together to make the transition as seamless as possible.

For the past year, engineers here have devoted their skills to the Tarin Kowt road construction project and ongoing base improvements.

The 864th is the first group of replacements to arrive here. The battalion is replacing elements from the 528th, 204th and 926th engineer battalions, and their primary mission will be to continue to work on the road and improve Forward Operating Base Ripley.

"We want to complete the road this year, and maintain security and safety, and continue to facilitate the extension of goodwill between the U.S. Army and the Afghan government and its people," said Capt. Matthew Templeman, commander of Company C, 864th Eng. Bn.



Sgt. Benjamin Reed, HSC, 528th Eng. Bn., and Spc. Katherine Edwards, Co. C, 864th Eng. Bn., survey a section of the Tarin Kowt road construction project at FOB Tiger on Feb. 6.



A Soldier from 926th Eng. Bn. passes tips to Spc. Tania Morris (right), Co. C, 864th Eng. Bn., a heavy equipment operator, during the two units' transition at FOB Tiger.

The base of operations for the new engineers is FOB Tiger, which was originally built as a temporary base camp to house and support engineers working on the road project. Thanks to a lot of hard work and a collective effort, the base is now twice its original size and contains shower and laundry facilities, a chow hall and a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation center.

"We were the first ones here," said Sgt. Scott Szabo, Co. B, 204th Eng. Bn.

"Everything was built from the ground up. Every nut and bolt, every piece of wood was loaded up and moved out here from (Kandahar Airfield). It wasn't easy, but we're proud of the work we've done to get to this point," said Szabo.

The 864th arrived in mid-January and are slowly rotating out to the FOB from Kandahar Airfield.

Many have already begun working on the road.

"We're just trying to show them the ropes," said Sgt. Benjamin Reed, Headquarters and Support Company, 528th Eng. Bn., land surveyor.

"We've already had the chance to

work out most of the bugs. We can pass on everything we've learned," he said.

Reed is one of several engineers working with incoming 864th Soldiers.

"So far, everything has been going pretty smooth," said Spc. William Nunn, a Co. C, 864th Eng. Bn., heavy equipment operator.

"I had the chance to actually get out on the road and work, get some operating time," he said.

As the current engineers prepare to redeploy, they are leaving behind a few words of wisdom for their replacements.

"The main thing is safety," said Sgt. 1st Class Colvin Adams, a construction equipment operator supervisor for Co. B, 926th Eng. Bn.

"You have to watch your buddy and be aware of what you're doing at all times, especially around this heavy equipment. An accident can happen at anytime," he said.

The 864th Eng. Bn. is an active-duty unit from Fort Richardson, Alaska. This is their first major deployment since Operation Desert Storm.

The best words of advice the engineers bestowed upon their replacements during their transition — "Do your job the best you can," said Sgt. Sir Johnson, a truck driver with Co. C, 528th Eng. Bn. "Take care of business."

National Military Academy Afghanistan opens doors

Story by Lt. Col. Susan Meisner
Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan — On a snowy day in February, Afghanistan's first class of cadets took their place in history and reported for duty at the new National Military Academy Afghanistan.

The academy is located on the grounds of a former flight technology school in Kabul.

Modeled after the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the academy is a four-year, degree-granting institution that will commission second lieutenants for the Afghan National Army.

Cadets will earn an engineering degree with an emphasis on civil, mechanical, systems or electrical engineering.

They will incur a 25-year service commitment upon graduation.

Assistant Minister for Personnel and Education Hodayun Fawzi welcomed the first class, telling them to "be proud of their enlistment in this academy."

Planning for the academy began more than a year ago, when then Office of Military Cooperation – Afghanistan Chief Maj. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry and senior Afghan Ministry of Defense leaders decided to establish an academy that would be the "crown jewel" of Afghan education.

Military Academy Study Team Chief Col. Barney Forsythe, OMC-A, and Maj. Gen. Mohammad Juma Nassar, MoD general staff working group director, submitted their initial plan for the academy to the

MoD and chief of OMC-A in November 2003.

West Point deans and department heads then began the planning process, deploying to Afghanistan for several months at a time to write policy, develop admission standards and determine the curriculum. They completed all these steps hand-in-hand with their MoD counterparts, to ensure programs were adapted to meet Afghan standards and culture.

The MoD identified 1,023 potential professors with the necessary advanced degrees and eventually hired 30 professors to form the academic faculty.

By the end of November 2004, 353 cadet candidates had completed the competitive entrance exam. The MoD, in conjunction with OMC-A staff, then conducted personal interviews and selected the top 120 young men to join the first class.

Future classes will have between 250 and 300 students each, and upperclassmen will take on leadership roles in guiding the underclassmen.

The curriculum focuses on engineering, because "our country is war struck and devastated," said Afghan Maj. Gen. Mohammed Sharif, academy superintendent. "We are in the process of rehabilitating it. We need more engineers because we need reconstruction."



Staff Sgt. Jerad Myers

Cadet Ahmad Fahim (left) was the first to in-process Feb. 3, the opening day for the National Military Academy Afghanistan.

"Our objective is to make a very strong and reliable army for Afghanistan," said Afghan 1st Lt. Abdul Haq, a platoon leader and military instructor at the academy.

"It should be accepted by all people," he said. "I was waiting to see the wars ended and see people take part in educational programs."

Some cadets have spent a lifetime planning for this day.

"Ever since I was a child I wanted to join the army. I left Kabul University and changed my major to come here," said Abdul Saboor from Baghlan province.

The future is bright for Afghanistan and for these young men who have stood up to be counted and take their place in history.

Enduring Voices

What is the most rewarding aspect of Operation Enduring Freedom?



Spc. Adam Foisy
Btry. F, 7th FA Rgt.
"To see the change in the villages we travel to."



Air Force Airman 1st Class Todd Mesman
455th EOG
"Helping out another country while serving my own."



Capt. Raymond Bradley
325th CSH
"Being able to put my training and practice to work in a deployed environment."



Marine Cpl. Oscar Solavega
3rd Bn., 3rd Marines
"The look on the kids' faces when they receive things, such as school supplies or clothes."



Operation Bear's Paw provides aid to Afghans

Story and photos by
Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FIREBASE LAGMAN, Afghanistan — When temperatures dropped to 22 degrees below zero and the snow was waist-high in some areas, many Afghans in southern Afghanistan's Zabul Province found themselves unable to obtain food and other commodities.

To aid them, the "Cacti" Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, quickly launched Operation Bear's Paw — an emergency humanitarian

assistance mission.

"We've been providing (emergency) humanitarian assistance since about Feb. 7," said Sgt. Stephen D. Pezzullo, a Company B, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., team leader.

The battalion loaded pallets of rice, beans, wheat, oil, water and other supplies onto CH-47 Chinook helicopters, then distributed the goods throughout the province.

"Just seeing the looks on the people's faces makes what we're doing worth it," said Spc. Matthew W. Buchanan, a Co. B

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Humanitarian assistance coordinated through work of many forward assets

Story by Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FIREBASE LAGMAN, Afghanistan — Last month, the "Cacti" Soldiers of 2nd Battalion, 35th Infantry Regiment, distributed tons of food to the citizens of southern Afghanistan, helping them survive one of the country's worst winters in recent history.

While Operation Bear's Paw might have seemed simple to the casual observer, many Soldiers spent as many as 16 hours a day ensuring the mission went off without a hitch.

"There are so many different moving parts to this operation," said Maj. Eric Barker, 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., civil affairs officer. "The entire task force is really working toward getting the Afghans food."

The operation began in early February, when the Soldiers started noticing traffic jams — one lasting three days, said Barker.

Soon, reports came in about problems throughout the region. Many Afghans were snowed in, unable to get the food they needed to survive.

"The weather has been really bad," said Barker. "This is the most precipitation this region has had in seven years."

As a result, vehicles were unable to pass in or out of certain areas to deliver food.

One "vehicle" able to get to many of the stranded vehicles, however, is the CH-47 Chinook helicopter.

Nearly every day, teams of Soldiers at Kandahar Airfield and Firebase Lagman loaded pallets of food — rice, beans, flour and peanut oil — into the back of helicopters and distributed them to Afghans in need.

This required coordination for receiving the food, coordination for the aircraft and coordination with the village elders.

"Every day one of us is meeting trucks at the gate," said Spc. Kyle C. Clanton, a civil affairs Soldier with 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt. "Then, myself and a team of Soldiers download the food from the truck into a conex."

The trucks carried food that was either purchased in Kandahar or donated by World Food Program, a non-profit organization that helps people in need.

The next step was for the Soldiers to build the pallets. About 10 pallets were built each day. Each pallet contained enough food to feed several families of 10 for 30 days — enough to get them through the worst of the winter conditions.

The pallets were loaded onto the helicopters with a forklift. Four pallets fit on one helicopter, enabling the pilots to make multiple rounds. As the helicopter emptied, they continued to pick up full pallets and the infantrymen who distributed them.

"The line Soldiers are the ones who actually help download the pallets at the villages and distribute the supplies," said Clanton.

The teams visited about six villages each day. With the day's deliveries complete, they returned to either Kandahar or Firebase Lagman, where the process began all over. It will continue until the weather has improved enough for the Afghans to reach their own food sources.

Above: Spc. Jorge Cuevas and an Afghan man carry a bag of beans to distribute to the citizens of Khak Afghan.

Right: Soldiers from 2nd Bn., 35th Inf. Rgt., unload supplies from the back of a CH-47 Chinook helicopter in southern Afghanistan, where residents have been unable to obtain food because of weather conditions.



K2's military police protect Uzbek outpost

Story and photo by
Air Force Tech Sgt. Scott T. Sturkol
416th Air Expeditionary Group

KARSHI-KHANABAD AIR BASE, Uzbekistan — Covering the bicep on their left arm is an arm brassard emblazoned with two letters — MP.

In the 13th Military Police Detachment at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, Uzbekistan, are more than 50 people who make it their mission to protect everyone on base. That effort requires patrolling the base's perimeter areas, guarding entry control points and ensuring deployed personnel obey the rules of law enforcement.

For most of the MPs, each shift runs 12 hours or longer, depending on the events of the day, said Staff Sgt. Christopher Van Roekel, squad leader. Their shift coverage is "24-7-365," meaning they are always on the job.

Each shift change begins with guard-mount, where MPs are briefed on everything from challenge passwords for the day to security updates, said Van Roekel.

"It's a time-honored tradition that goes back many, many years for military police," said Van Roekel of challenge passwords, who has been an MP for nine years.

During guard-mount, each MP who goes on duty also participates in an in-ranks inspection where the squad leader checks to ensure they are wearing the same uniform items, they have all of their equipment and they are ready for duty.

"My job also requires me to make sure

they are issued the weapons and ammunition they need to do their job," said Van Roekel. "They sign out their weapons and ammunition — everything has to be accounted for."

Though guard-mount may best represent how the 13th MP

Detachment's motto of "strength and honor" plays a role in every MP's daily life, Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Queen, provost sergeant for the company, said his MPs take pride in what they do.

"Standards and discipline are apparent in everything we do," said Queen. "Our basic mission of ensuring the safety of all personnel at K-2 means we have to be disciplined and ready all the time."

Soldiers in the detachment come from all over and are deployed for at least a year. Some hail from Fort Richardson and Fort Wainwright, Alaska, while others come from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and the Florida National Guard.

"We have quite a diverse group," said Queen. "Many of us have been here since last April."

Some of the Soldiers also come in to support from forward operating bases in Afghanistan.

Pfc. Kristofer Morash came up to sup-



Sgt. Alex Martinez, 13th Military Police Detachment, sets in position with a machine gun during a training scenario at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, Uzbekistan.

port the 13th MP Company from Bagram Airfield. While at Bagram, Morash worked law enforcement activities.

"I'm extremely proud to be here," said Morash. "We have a pretty important job here, keeping everyone on post safe — it's our top priority."

Keeping the post safe means staying ahead of the enemy threats. That's where Sgt. 1st Class Eric Gutierrez steps in as the company's anti-terrorism and force protection noncommissioned officer in charge.

"The big thing is the evolving," said Gutierrez. "No one threat ever stays the same, so it's important to be aware of what's happening."

"Complacency is a number one killer of Soldiers," he said. "So a heightened sense of urgency ... is crucial. Our NCOs here, though, do a great job to keep all our MPs

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PHOTOS FROM THE FIELD

The contrails of a jet are evident in the sky over Charkh District in Logar Province while Marines from 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, escort members of the Task Force Victory Surgeon Cell to a village targeted for a cooperative medical assistance mission.

*Photo by Lt. Col. Mark J. Martinez
TF Victory Surgeon Cell*

If you have high-quality photos of service members supporting the Coalition mission or enjoying well-deserved off-duty time, please e-mail them to freedomwatch@baf.af.mil. Please include full identification and caption information, including who is in the photo and what action is taking place.



Spotlight on Joint Task Force Wings



Marine Staff Sgt. Rusty Baker

Story by Spc. Chris Stump
17th Public Affairs Detachment

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, AFGHANISTAN — The wings of life, death, and everything in between are brought to bear on the battlefields of Operation Enduring Freedom by one of the most vital task forces supporting the Coalition effort in Afghanistan.

From medical evacuation missions with Army UH-60 Blackhawks to close air support with Marine AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters, Joint Task Force Wings has been supporting the Coalition here since its inception in May 2004. And it has done it to farther reaches than any unit before.

Commanded by Col. B. Shannon Davis, JTF Wings incorporates Army and Marine Corps assets into its mission of providing rotary-wing combat support to every corner of Afghanistan.

Whether it is engaging the enemy in support of infantrymen in contact on some remote mountainside, or touching down in a village to deliver shoes and coats to shivering Afghans, JTF Wings has done it all in the skies over Afghanistan.

The task force is helping the war on terror by “going out and engaging the local population with humanitarian efforts, with goodwill,” said Davis.

Wings also goes out “with a big stick when needed. With our attack helicopters, and even our door guns on our (UH)-60s

when needed,” he added.

Despite flying more than 67,000 combat hours — more than any other aviation unit in OEF’s history — Davis said it’s not all just about his task force. Nothing here would be possible without air-ground coordination.

“Effective air-ground coordination and air-ground integrations effectively use all our helicopter assets to the maximum advantage,” he said.

Nearly every aspect of every mission has depended upon air-ground coordination.



Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl

“Wings has been involved in just about every major operation that has gone on in Afghanistan,” said JTF Wings Operations Officer Maj. David Francis. “Just about all of them have involved rotary-wing assets in some way, shape, or form.”

These missions involved more than just getting a fire team from its base camp to a landing zone. They provided the logistical support necessary to keep the Coalition moving forward.

“JTF Wings has moved over 12 million pounds of cargo (and) 80,000 (passengers) and flown hundreds of MEDEVAC missions for U.S. and Coalition soldiers and local nationals,” said Francis.

The air assets provided by JTF Wings would be important no matter where in the world they might find themselves, but are even more important in Afghanistan’s vast and rugged terrain.

“If Task Force Wings were not here, Coalition soldiers would be isolated to

Left: Jeremy J. Biery, a crew chief with Co. D, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., inspects the rotors of a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter before a maintenance test flight at Kandahar Airfield.

Top: Returning from a series of evacuation missions, a MEDEVAC crew lands their UH-60 Blackhawk on the flightline of FOB Salerno.



Spc. Cheryl Ransford

Above: Marine Lance Cpl. Edmund Billman (nearest helicopter), HMLA 773, disarms the weapons systems on a Cobra attack helicopter while Marine Sgt. Steven Boyd (right), also of HMLA 773, gives hand and arm signals to the crew.

Right: Chief Warrant Officer David Sessoms, a maintenance test pilot with Co. A, 2nd Bn., 25th Avn. Rgt., prepares for a test flight on a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter after its engine was replaced.



Sgt. Stephanie L. Carl

those locations they could only get to by vehicle, which is very restricted in this country,” said Francis.

To move personnel and supplies throughout Afghanistan, Wings has both Army and Marine helicopter assets.

One of the Army units is the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) that has flown hundreds of missions in its Blackhawks in support of wounded Coalition members and Afghan citizens.

The other Army units – 2nd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment; 1st Battalion, 211th Avn. Rgt. (Attack), Utah National Guard; and Co. B, 193rd Avn. Rgt., Hawaii National Guard; – deploy their UH-60s, AH-64 Apaches and CH-47 Chinooks to protect and move personnel and equipment rapidly throughout the area of operations.

The 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, operates a ground troop and two air cavalry troops with OH-58D Kiowas to conduct reconnaissance and security operations in support of regional commands.

The Marine squadrons include Heavy Marine Helicopter Squadron 462 and Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, which provide transport and attack capabilities, respectively, to Coalition commanders.

Having all these assets available has enabled commanders to effectively accomplish what they came here to do, said Davis.

“Aviation has allowed our force to move around the battlefield, which is all of Afghanistan,” he said.

Its reach and scope of missions far surpass that of any unit before it in OEF.

“We have extended Combined Joint Task Force-76’s reach within Afghanistan,” said Francis. “We started with 5 forward arming and refueling points. We now have 16 that allow us to go anywhere in this country. We have effectively extended the reach of our ground commanders throughout Afghanistan.”

But a task force is only as good as the officers, noncommissioned officers and Soldiers in it.

“The young men and women, coupled with good leaders – great leaders – and the tenacity,

the pride in the American people back home, have really kept us motivated over here,” said Davis.

A couple of those quality leaders Davis has in his command are HMLA 773 Marines Maj. Dave Deep, an AH-1 pilot, and Sgt. Eric Sharp, a UH-1 Iroquois crew chief.

“The leaders and Marines of the squadron – from the lance corporals on up – display a lot of integrity in this mission, which makes this squadron much better,” said Deep.

Being able to count on these leaders has made the Marine aviators a vital asset to JTF Wings.

Especially when the bullets fly and the troops on the ground need the Marines’ assistance.

Always flying for those on the ground is what Sharp says he’s here for.

“I can’t imagine the mission here without helicopter assets,” he said. “We’ve got a really dedicated work force here that is ready at any time to launch our birds and respond to anything.”

The dedication of the lowest ranking service member to the most seasoned leaders in their chain of command is what makes JTF Wings successful.

“Without question, Wings is successful because of the professional officers, NCOs and Soldiers and Marines that make up this task force,” said Davis.

“And without their creativeness, ingenuity and drive to accomplish the mission, we wouldn’t be nearly as successful as we are.”



Spc. Cheryl Ransford

Soldiers from JTF Wings prepare to slingload a conex that will be taken to Jildalek village. The conex was filled with food and other supplies to help the villagers get through the winter.

Artillerymen show Coalition presence

FOB Tiger Soldiers conduct patrols through southern Afghanistan

Story and photos by Spc. Dijon Rolle
17th Public Affairs Detachment

FORWARD OPERATING BASE TIGER, Afghanistan — A convoy of up-armored high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicles maneuvered through the mountainous terrain blanketing southern Afghanistan.

In the vehicles were Soldiers from Battery C, 3rd Battalion, 7th Field Artillery Regiment. The group conducts daily presence patrols throughout their area of operations near Forward Operating Base Tiger.

"We're out here to provide a presence for the Coalition," said 2nd Lt. Edward Harrison, the Btry. C fire direction officer.

"We're here to help, and this is one way that we can express this to the people, by being out, talking to them and assisting them with the resources we have available."

The Soldiers often stop by the neighboring villages to speak with residents. The informal chats are a way for both sides to communicate face-to-face.

"The people are happy because they have a voice," said Jawid, one of the interpreters who often accompanies the Soldiers. "For the first time, they can express their concerns, their thoughts openly."

"It is a good thing the patrols are coming through here and the Coalition is making this effort," he said.

Another benefit of this type of mission is the opportunity for route reconnaissance.

"We're always looking for new ways to get from one point to another," said Harrison. "We can use this information and pass it on to the units coming after us."

The artillerymen's primary mission is to be a force protection asset for the base. The group has seen a lot during this deployment and daily missions like these help them understand why their jobs are so important.

"It kind of opened my eyes more when I saw the conditions some of the villagers



Above: 2nd Lt. Edward Harrison, the Btry. C, 3rd Bn., 7th FA Rgt., fire direction officer, shares a laugh with a village elder during a presence patrol through Shawli Kot District in southern Afghanistan. **Left:** Soldiers from Btry. C, ride through Shawli Kot District near FOB Tiger during a daily presence patrol. The battery conducts patrols through the area to show the villagers the good intentions of the Coalition's presence in Afghanistan.

were living in and some of the problems they have to deal with," said Spc. Bryan Young, a Btry. C cannon crew member.

"You take a lot for granted," he said.

The artillery Soldiers say that while they've had to endure their fair share of bad weather, equipment problems and other challenges, they've remained focused on accomplishing their mission.

"We're field artillery Soldiers, but we had to take on different roles here — infantry, MPs," said Staff Sgt. Leondra Felder, a Btry. C section chief.

"Yet, we came out here, did what we

needed to do and made it happen. We deal with things as they come," he said. "Whether it's a flat tire, weather, whatever, you adapt and overcome — the mission doesn't stop."

The mission hasn't stopped for the Soldiers, but they look forward to wrapping up their year-long deployment in the next few months.

"Safety and teamwork are at the forefront of every operation (we) conduct," said Harrison. "We want everyone to leave Afghanistan the same way they came — combat ready."

Shindand Soldiers get a taste of Afghan markets

Vendors sell goods to Soldiers, civilians at western airfield

Story and photos by
Spc. Cheryl Ransford
17th Public Affairs Detachment

SHINDAND AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — As an escape from the everyday stresses of being deployed, the Soldiers and civilians at Shindand Airfield get a weekly break in the form of shopping in an Afghan market.

Once a week, local vendors come to the airfield in western Afghanistan to offer their goods to the Soldiers here.

"Being able to shop at the bazaar gives



Above: Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Lawrence, 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., examines a rug at the Shindand Airfield bazaar.

Right: Lawrence looks at jewelry boxes and trinkets.



Staff Sgt. Lance Fisher, Co. C, 367th Eng. Bn., inspects a vest prior to purchasing it from a vendor at the Shindand Airfield bazaar.

the troops something to do," said Spc. Daniel Rivera, Troop A, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment. "They are able to get a couple things they are missing by not being at home."

At the bazaar, Soldiers are able to buy everything from CDs and DVDs to carpets, knives and rare antiques.

"The vendors who come to the base to sell their goods are local livestock traders and local laborers, as well as store keepers in Shindand village and Herat," said 3rd Sqdn., 4th Cav. Rgt., Command Sgt. Maj. Christopher Taylor.

When the bazaar first started in Shindand, there were only three car loads worth of vendors, said Taylor. Now, the bazaar has grown to include more than 30 vendors and camel and horse rides.

With the increase in vendors, the Soldiers are given a wider variety of items to choose from.

"It is a benefit to the Soldiers in that they are able to buy local items to send home as gifts and souvenirs to show others what

they were able to see while they were in Afghanistan," said Taylor.

Along with giving the Soldiers a break in day-to-day activities and providing them with a glimpse of another culture, the bazaar also helps the Afghans build their economy and gain an understanding of free enterprise.

"The local vendors are able to see what can be gained by selling their goods," said Taylor. "For some it is a skill that they have never before had the opportunity to use."

Although the bazaar is held just once a week, it still adds a richness to the lives of all involved that wouldn't otherwise be there.

Rivera said the chance to interact with people from another country while enjoying the pastime of shopping at "swap meets" gives the Soldiers a little extra bit of normalcy in their life that may be missing during the deployment.

Army Reserve Affairs

Room 207, Motel Six
Bagram Airfield
DSN: 318-231-4353

National Guard or Reserve units throughout Afghanistan interested in scheduling briefings, or those with questions for ARA personnel, can visit the office or call.

VICTIM-WITNESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

- Have you suffered direct physical or emotional harm as a result of the commission of a crime?
- Have you observed a crime being committed?
- Do you have information about a crime?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, please contact the Bagram Airfield Victim-Witness Liaison at DSN 318-231-4016.

Air Force logisticians keep mission moving

Story and photo by Air Force Capt. Catie Hague
455th Air Expeditionary Wing Public Affairs

BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan — They “move the mission,” keeping the busiest airfield in Afghanistan operational.

They are the men and women of the 455th Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron, and their job is to support all air-lift coming in and out of Bagram Airfield, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

“Last month we pushed more than 10,000 passengers and 12 million pounds of cargo,” said Air Force Maj. Rich Fillman, 455th ELRS commander. “Per day, that translates into about 300 people and 334,000 pounds of supplies.

“There’s very little down time,” he said. “We average one aircraft on the ground every hour, ’round the clock.”

The ELRS has seven functional areas – the passenger terminal, transient alert, supply, fuels, transportation management, vehicle maintenance and the air terminal operations center. The last is the main focus – loading and unloading passengers and cargo.

“As soon as an aircraft lands, we find out what’s coming off the plane, we get on our forklifts and head out to the aircraft,” said Air Force Airman 1st Class Rodney Calloway, an air transportation specialist. “When the loadmaster opens the door, we drive up to the back of the plane and remove the cargo as quickly and safely as possible.”

It usually takes about 15 minutes to unload a C-130 carrying six pallets.

“We try to cycle through our five forklifts,” said Air Force Airman Carlos Reyes, also an air transportation specialist. “It’s cold out here and most of our trucks are convertibles. Our



Air Force Staff Sgt. Robert Willis, an air transportation specialist with the 455th ELRS, uses a forklift to transport cargo to a C-17 for loading.

hands and feet tend to get numb, so we drive for about two or three hours and then switch drivers.”

The logistics teams’ ultimate goal is to move aircraft in and out without delay, due to “security reasons and limited parking,” said Calloway.

While some of the cargo and passengers traveling to Bagram end up here, the rest are re-palletized and re-manifested for transport to other locations.

“We move the mission not only for the Air Force, but for the Army, Marines, Navy and our Coalition partners as well,” said Fillman.

As Reyes said, it’s the duty of the ELRS to get things where they need to be, when they need to be there, all in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.

“Bottom line,” said Fillman, “without the 455th ELRS, the mission at Bagram stops.”

Dari/Pashtu phrase of the week



It’s nice to meet you

Dari

Az deedan-e-shuma khoosh hal shudam

(Oz dee-dawn-a-shoo-mah hoosh haul shoo-dahm)

Pashtu

Da tasoo leedena sokha khoosh hal shooma

(Dah tah-soo lee-deh-nah sow-ha hoosh haul shoo-mah)

Afghan cultural tidbit

Afghans in the United States on average have a higher level of education than many other refugee groups. In Islam, education is valued more than wealth. Most children of Afghan refugees and immigrants are college educated or enrolled in higher education, and many young adults are now entering the professional sector.

Proper hygiene keeps Coalition fit to fight

Safeguarding the Coalition

Story and photo by Sgt. Frank Magni
17th Public Affairs Detachment

AFGHANISTAN — Proper hygiene is critical to remaining combat-ready.

To ensure service members stay healthy, most forward operating bases throughout Afghanistan offer plenty of opportunities for good hygiene, like running water for showers and hand-washing stations next to the chow line.

However, the situation quickly changes when the mission dictates continuous operations away from established bases. When this occurs, Coalition members must quickly adapt or become susceptible to the many harmful effects of poor hygiene.

In fact, when there is a lack of formal washing facilities, it should be an indication that more attention must be paid to good hygiene, said Capt. Susan Thomas, FOB Salerno Field Hospital nurse.

With the combination of increased activity and more exposure to Afghanistan's foreign environment, the field can leave little room for error in terms of hygiene.

"Many (service members) are exposed to many potential problems when traveling off post in Afghanistan," said Thomas. "But many problems can be avoided with preventive steps."

After more than ten months of experiencing service members coming into the hospital for treatment, Thomas has seen many situations that could have been prevented, she said.

Bacterial infections and dysentery, along with parasites like worms, are all common ailments she treats. But the chances of being infected with illnesses like these are greatly diminished with regular hand washing.

"If you can do anything to prevent illness, hand washing remains Number 1," said Thomas.

In addition to always washing hands before eating a meal, Thomas recommends doing so before and after using the restroom.

Following this regimen is easy with sinks and hand washing stations on FOBs, but in the field where these amenities are practically non-existent, service members do have alternatives.

Thomas said using an anti-bacterial hand sanitizer works just as well as hot water and soap. It is actually the preferred method if service members are

wounds are not kept clean," said Thomas.

While maintaining proper hygiene in the field has many benefits from a health perspective, it is also closely related to remaining combat ready and more prepared for mission completion.

For Marines like Cpl. Erik DeGiorgi and Lance Cpl. David Hughes, both from Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, maintaining good hygiene habits in the field is a way of life. Regularly embarking on missions lasting four to eight days, the Marines have incorporated ways to stay clean into their battle rhythm.

In place of showers, the Marines use baby wipes, said Hughes.

They also concentrate on switching out dirty articles of clothing — socks and boots in particular.

From a preventive perspective, Thompson recommends all service members in the field change their socks at least once a day to prevent foot fungus and other conditions.

In addition to changing socks, the Marines also rotate pairs of boots each day. This allows the alternate pair time to dry.

Rotating boots has become increasingly important during the winter months, when many units are maneuvering in areas with snow on the ground.

DeGiorgi constantly monitors his Marines' hygiene habits, so much so that it has become another pre-combat inspection.

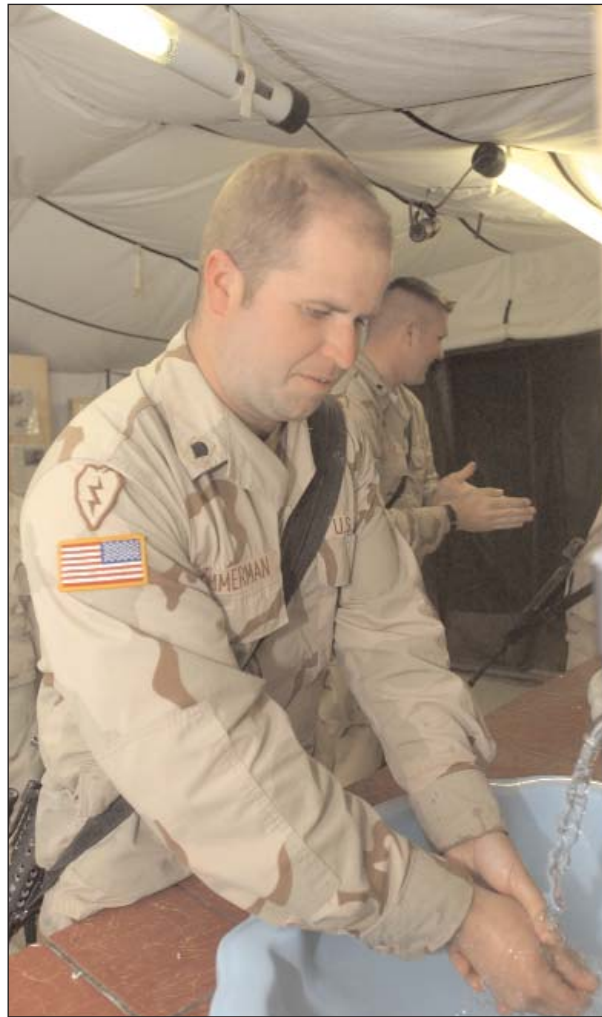
"I know we are all grown-ups here, but this stuff is very important," he said. "If they aren't doing the right thing, they won't be 100 percent for the mission."

DeGiorgi is very candid with his Marines, because hygiene is not a matter of vanity, but the entire team's health.

"We are in such close proximity to each other daily, if one person catches something, it can easily be passed to everyone," he said.

Thomas echoed this statement.

"There is a bit of a stigma that has developed in the military that it is all right to be dirty in the field," said Thomas. "But (service members) have to know that there is more at stake when it comes to hygiene than offending the person sitting beside them."



Spc. Jeff Zimmerman, 546th Maintenance Co., washes his hands prior to eating at the Forward Operating Base Salerno mess tent. Preventive medicine experts say washing hands is one of the best and easiest things to do to prevent illness.

uncertain of local water supplies.

Keeping cuts and scrapes clean and covered while in the field is also something commonly ignored.

"Infections can set in very quickly if

Commo Soldiers provide clear signal for operations

Story and photo by
Sgt. Jennifer S. Emmons
17th Public Affairs Detachment

GHAZNI PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM, Afghanistan — Without communication on the battlefield, there would be chaos. Without signal Soldiers and their equipment in forward locations, there would be no medical evacuations or calls for fire from troops in contact.

At the Ghazni Provincial Reconstruction Team in central Afghanistan, two Soldiers ensure all the equipment remains operational, providing essential communications abilities. The Soldiers provide 24-hour-a-day maintenance on the many different communications systems used at this remote location.

"There are numerous PRT sites and (forward operating bases)," said Staff Sgt. John Summers, Company C, 125th Signal Battalion. "We provide commanders with the ability to talk with the other commanders in the area so they have a clear picture of what is going on throughout the region."

There are several forms of communications available to commanders.

"Our work allows them the means of voice, Internet and data communications," said Spc. Rob Johnson, Co. C, 125th Sig. Bn.

Having the proper communications plan

is vital to the mission in many ways.

"When you need to call for fire or call for a MEDEVAC, you will use the systems we put in place," he said. "Requesting supplies, support or transportation couldn't be done without communications."

Communications are key to the success of any mission.

"I tell my Soldiers that they have two best friends out here," said Sgt. John Stange, Task Force 168, operations noncommissioned officer. "The guy next to you and your communications. Without those two things, you couldn't survive."

Bottom line — communications saves lives.

"It allows all the commanders to be on the same sheet of music," said Summers.

"It's a good thing they do a good job," said Stange. "The lives of the team and your platoon members depend on good communications."

Setting up the equipment when they arrived at the remote location was a huge task, but nothing these signal Soldiers couldn't handle.

"We had communications within 36 minutes of when we arrived at Ghazni," said Summers. "The commander was able to contact his superiors within an hour of our arrival."

The speed at which the communications Soldiers work impresses those they support.



Spc. Rob Johnson, Co. C, 125th Sig. Bn., disassembles the panels of a satellite at the Ghazni PRT before moving it to another location. With the satellite in a new location, the PRT will be able to receive a better signal.

"The communications guys are doing a great job," said Stange. "They make the mission run smoothly."

With operations occurring throughout the country, communications proves to be one of the most important jobs in Operation Enduring Freedom.

"No one else could do their job if they weren't able to talk to each other," said Johnson.

MEDEVAC: Aviators earn unit award for combat mission

continued from Page 3

Hoffman, who was attached to the 68th Med. Co. from the 159th Medical Company (AA), Wiesbaden, Germany. "They were very happy to get back in the aircraft."

With Ramirez and the PA back on board, the crew flew to a more suitable hoist-extraction point and picked up the two Marine KIAs. They returned to FOB Asadabad for a third refuel, dropped off the PA and picked up the stabilized Marine. After five grueling hours, the crew was finally able to make the hour-long flight back to Bagram and get their patient to the hospital.

When they returned, the crew began discussing the evening's events. They were "excited about what we had just done," said Hoffman.

Then the reality set in and "it was just kind of immediate exhaustion," he said. "We were on an adrenaline rush for several hours."

"It wasn't something that everyone wants to experience," said Hernandez. "We didn't think we were coming back after that mission. It was very ugly, very long."

When it was all said and done, the crew logged six flight hours, with four of them under night vision, came under enemy fire and conducted multiple hoist extractions. The combination of all these challenges made the mission memorable for the crew. They all agree that the most rewarding aspect of the mission is that their patient survived.

"Every mission that we go on as MEDEVAC, you always try to prepare yourself for the situation," said Ramirez. "Get in the frame of mind that anything could go wrong. You always plan for the worst and expect the best. And that's exactly what happened."

"It was a very tough mission, but we

kept our heads," said Hernandez.

All four crewmembers were awarded Air Medals with Valor device. But the accolades didn't stop there.

The unit was nominated for and won the Army Aviation Association of America Air/Sea Rescue of the Year award.

The award was given to the 68th Med. Co. in the form of a unit award. That's a testament to the fact that regardless of who had been on the mission that day last June, it would have been just as successful, said Rayburn.

"Anybody here could have done the same thing," agreed Hoffman.

The crew is honored to be part of the 68th Med. Co., a unit they feel is worthy of such a prestigious award.

"This was really an awesome thing that you don't get to do very often," said Rayburn. "The whole crew felt that it was the mission of your life."

Police: MPs provide additional protection to outposts

continued from Page 7

ready and that in turn makes us a better prepared force.”

The MP detachment has a unique working relationship with security members from other services.

On the air base, there are Air Force security forces who work flightline security, so the MPs often coordinate protection areas with the Air Force securi-

ty through the base defense operations center. And, within the detachment, there are two military working dog handlers from the U.S. Navy, including Petty Officer 1st Class Patrick Young and Petty Officer 2nd Class Brian Thomas.

“We all wear the same uniform and fight on the same side,” said Queen. “We all work together to meet the missions we have to do and meet

our top priority – protecting the people and resources of (K-2).”

Whether it means doing customs for redeploying personnel, cruising on patrol by car or on foot, or ensuring the people and vehicles coming through the main gate are free of items that could cause harm, the MPs of K-2 will continue to do their job to the best of their ability, said military

policeman Sgt. Patrick Conesa.

“It’s an important role we play over here,” said Conesa. “We keep K-2 safe and secure and we have a lot of great people doing it.”

With “strength and honor,” they continue every day. And every day they have a reminder, in big letters set on their left shoulder – “MP” – that their mission is never done. It goes on “24-7-365.”

Bear *continued from Page 7*

radio telephone operator. “At one point when we were landing, we could hear the people cheering. They knew we were there to help.”

Everywhere the Soldiers have gone, they’ve seen the appreciation the Afghans have for the assistance.

“When we drop off the humanitarian assistance, you can see the joy in their eyes,” said Spc. Adam A. Potter, a Co. B rifleman.

The Soldiers aren’t just bringing joy to the Afghans’ lives – in some cases they are making a healthy livelihood possible.

“One day we came across a bus (full of people) that was stranded in the snow for 36 hours without heat,” said Spc. John Riggins, a Co. B medic. “A woman had given birth during the night.”

The Soldiers quickly warmed the newborn, then escorted the mother and child to Qalat Hospital for treatment.

The convoy continued back to Firebase Lagman to pick up more supplies.

Despite how tired they were, the Soldiers returned to the broken-down bus with blankets to keep the passengers warm, said Pezzullo.

“It didn’t matter that we were tired,” he said. “We did what we knew had to be done.”

“Those people probably

wouldn’t have survived without our help,” added Riggins.

While the Afghans are benefiting from the missions, each Soldier is gaining something as well.

“I’ve learned to appreciate what I have,” said Buchanan. “I will never take certain things for granted again – especially my family, friends and wife.”

Potter noted the differences between the United States and Afghanistan.

“I can tell people what it’s like all day,” he said. “But until you’ve experienced it firsthand, you have no idea.”

While the humanitarian assistance missions are helping the Afghans, they’re also giving the Soldiers an opportunity to reflect on their combat experiences in Afghanistan.

The Cacti are closing in on the end of a one-year deployment, and the Soldiers appreciate the opportunity to have such a meaningful mission so close to the end.

“These people can’t go anywhere to get food,” said Buchanan. “It feels good to know we’re ending with something like this rather than a combat operation. We’re really making a difference in every one of their lives, and that’s a good feeling.”

Functions test



Sgt. 1st Class Darren D. Heusel

Romanian Chief Warrant Officer Gabriel Ana checks the calibration on the barrel of an RPG-7 rocket-propelled grenade launcher at the small arms Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration depot at Pol-e-Charki. Ana and a number of other Romanian small arms experts, commanded by Lt. Col. Virgil Petri, are on the front lines of the DDR process at Pol-e-Charki, ensuring that weapons turned into the depot are serviceable and ready to be integrated into service with the Afghan National Army.

Freedom Watch

March 6, 2005



In times of need...